

Wildlife Diversity News

A Publication of the Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program

Volume 8, Issue 3

Fall/Winter 2009

Return of the Trumpeter Swan

A prominent feature of the American wetlands in the early 1800s, trumpeter swans disappeared from Iowa before the start of the 20th century. For more than 100 years, these charismatic birds remained absent from the state. The Iowa DNR and several partner organizations decided to change that. In 1995, Iowa's trumpeter swan restoration program began with the goal to have 15 wild nesting pairs in Iowa.

Flightless birds (ones that have been injured and are unable to be released back into the wild) are paired up and placed on ponds around the state. The young swans, called cygnets, that hatch grow up to become the foundation for a wild swan population in Iowa. To date, nearly 1,000 cygnets have been raised successfully by 55 flightless pairs. These free-flying offspring have been sighted in 16 U.S. states and 2 Canadian provinces (see map, right).

The offspring have also come back to Iowa to nest. This year there were 37 nesting attempts. 32 of the wild pairs were successful, and about 80 cygnets joined their parents as wild swans who grew their flight feathers in Iowa.

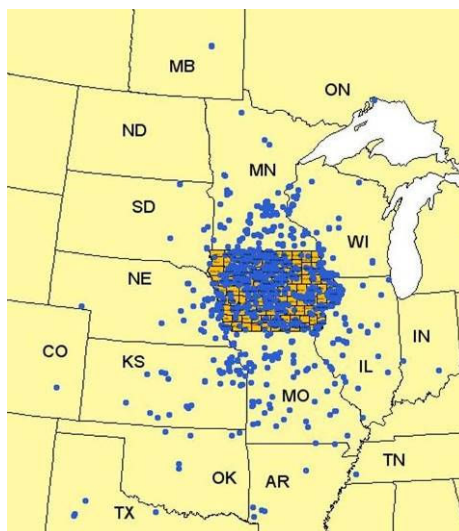
The trumpeter swan restoration program has been so successful, in fact, in 2008 a 3-year experimental migration study began, with the hope of restoring a migration route to historic swan wintering grounds in Arkansas. 18 swans were outfitted with green neck collars and released at sites, and another 15 will be released this winter. The hope is these birds will imprint on the area, return to Iowa to breed, and bring other swans back with them to winter.

If you see swans with neck collars, report your sighting to Ron Andrews or Dave Hoffman at 641-357-3517 or email them at:
Ron.Andrews@dnr.iowa.gov or
David.Hoffman.dnr.iowa.gov.
Please note the date and location of your sighting.

*- Jenni Dyar, AmeriCorps
Wildlife Diversity Research
Assistant*



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Trumpeter Swan Soiree

Saturday, Jan. 2, 2010 10am-2pm

Schildberg Rock Quarry, Atlantic, IA

Stop by to view the many wintering trumpeter swans and hear about trumpeter swan restoration programs. Come and enjoy this charismatic bird, the largest North American waterfowl. The Swan Soiree will be held unless there is a blizzard occurring. Hot drinks and hotdogs will be available. This is a cooperative effort between the Cass County Conservation Board and the Iowa DNR.

Edited by: Jenni Dyar, AmeriCorps

Notes from the Catbird Seat

While economic problems have increasingly shaken Iowa's state government this year, DNR's Wildlife Diversity Program (WDP) has continued to operate without any serious restrictions upon our activities—at least so far. We've suffered chronic budget shortages throughout our program's 28-year history and have relied upon income *not* related to general tax revenues. Consequently, when many agencies now are seeing their general revenue-funded budgets being slashed, the WDP has not had to suffer as great a reduction in our work. We are, nevertheless, reducing travel and public presentations, extending the length of time vehicles are being used before needing replacement, and instituting other cost-saving measures to do our share.

The brightest news for Wildlife Diversity came with a recent announcement that Congress passed the annual Interior Department Budget Bill, which includes the biggest increase in State Wildlife Grants (SWG) since 2001. This year, Iowa's apportionment of these federal funds will amount to approximately \$950,000, or roughly a 25% increase over the past several years. Although we must provide state or other non-federal matching funds to use this money, the increase will permit us to consider more pass-through grants for wildlife research or management, more land acquisition for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, and perhaps consider one or two new in-house research or habitat management projects. While we are not permitted to use SWG funds for day-to-day operations, they still promise to be a shot-in-the-arm during an otherwise lean financial period.

Another plus for our program has been the addition of one new permanent WDP team member, Paul Frese, who will serve as primary field operations manager for

the Multi-Species Inventory and Monitoring (MSIM) project. This project is funded with a State Wildlife Grant and thus its new position has not been subject to the state's current hiring freeze. In addition, we've just replaced outgoing Breeding Bird Atlas Coordinator Nicki Nagl with Billy Reiter-Marolf, a position funded through the AmeriCorps "Keepers of the Land" program.

Related to this last item, I'd like to finish by giving a big round of WDP Team "Thanks" to three outgoing staffers who've been absolutely essential to conducting some of our signature projects. Nicki Nagl has done a superb job of organizing and leading Iowa's second Breeding Bird Atlas project and is leaving only because she has served two years in AmeriCorps, the maximum amount of time allowed under that grant. Likewise, Josh Otten has provided tremendous help in overseeing operations of our temporary field employees collecting data for the MSIM project. We couldn't have conducted fieldwork without his dedication. Finally, we say goodbye to Kristin (Kuennen) Fankhauser, perhaps the best-natured birder anyone could ever hope to employ. Kristin has been part of a team monitoring bird use of habitat on lands enrolled in USDA's Wetland Reserve Program. We wish Nicki, Josh and Kristin all the best for their futures in wildlife conservation.

- Doug Harr

Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator

Get Involved: Citizen Science Opportunities

Project FeederWatch



©2008 Jenni Dyar

Nov. 14, 2009 - Apr. 9, 2010

To become part of Project FeederWatch, go to:

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>

Christmas Bird Counts



Dec. 14, 2009 - Jan. 5, 2010

To look for a count near you, visit:

<http://www.iowabirds.org/birds/>
and click on Christmas Bird Counts

Great Backyard Bird Count



Photo by Carl Kurtz

Feb. 12-15, 2010

To learn more about participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count, go to:

<http://www.birdcount.org/>



Iowa's Teaming With Wildlife Coalition

Over 230 groups working together to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered.

Meet the new members of the Wildlife Diversity Program!

Paul Frese, Natural Resource Technician II



I am very pleased to join the staff of the Wildlife Diversity Program. I will mostly be working with Karen Kinkead and the Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring Program, which is essentially a state-wide survey to gather information on the nearly 1000 Iowa wildlife species and their habitats.

I am joining the Iowa DNR after working for 9 years with the Natural Resource Conservation Service in Missouri. I formerly dealt with private lands wildlife management and agricultural planning in Gentry, Worth, and Harrison Counties in northwest Missouri.

I grew up on the outskirts of Bridgewater, Iowa, and attended college

at Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville. I worked for the Adair County Conservation Board during four summers through my college tenure. I then completed my graduate work at Missouri State University in Springfield.

I am very excited to be back in Iowa and have the chance to work with a variety of wildlife species and be a part of the dedicated staff of the Boone Wildlife Research Station.

Billy Reiter-Marolf, Breeding Bird Atlas Volunteer Coordinator



I am thrilled to spend my year-long AmeriCorps appointment with the Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program. My primary responsibility will be as Breeding Bird Atlas Coordinator, although I hope to help on as many wildlife projects as I can.

I grew up in Casper, Wyoming, and later Mount Vernon, Iowa, where I attended high school. I studied fine art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and more recently wildlife biology and management at the University of Wyoming. In Laramie, I also worked as a range aid for the Natural Resource Conservation Service and as a wildlife technician for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife

Service, the U.S. Forest Service and the Wyoming Natural Diversity Database.

I enjoy working with all types of wildlife but I especially love non-game species of birds, herps and mammals. I will be based in the Boone Wildlife Research Station, but I will be traveling the state to recruit volunteers, present BBA progress and atlas BBA blocks.



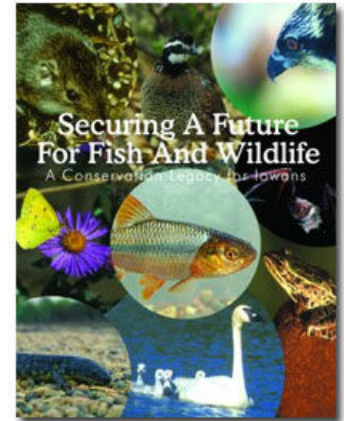
Wildlife Action Plan: Keeping Common Species Common

The Iowa Wildlife Action Plan (IWAP) is a roadmap to conservation for all Iowa wildlife. The purpose of the IWAP is to prevent species from becoming so rare that they need to be listed as threatened or endangered. This is cost-effective conservation, because once a species comes close to the brink of extirpation from the state, it is very costly to protect and restore.

The IWAP is also about partnerships in conservation. It is not a DNR plan, but a state plan, developed by and for the benefit of all conservation stakeholders. The guiding visions of the Action Plan were developed at a public forum with representatives from state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and private citizens. If the objectives which make up those visions are achieved, Iowa will be a state in which diverse, native ecosystems support viable wildlife populations which are managed using scientific principles, and Iowans will have ample opportunity to recreate in the outdoors and be educated about and engaged in the natural world.

The IWAP also specifically identifies certain species as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). This term has no legal definition, but rather serves the purpose of identifying which species need protection in order to prevent them from becoming rare. The list of SGCN includes threatened and endangered animals but goes beyond that to include other species which are declining but not yet imperiled enough to be considered endangered or threatened. Iowa evaluated 999 species of wildlife in 8 different taxonomic groups, and categorized 296 as SGCN. The plan brings the threats to these species and actions needed to conserve them into sharper focus, and provides a way for many different conservation entities to coordinate strategies to safeguard Iowa's declining wildlife.

As part of the IWAP Implementation Committee structure, there is a subcommittee for each of the eight taxonomic groups covered in the Plan. These expert panels made up of citizens, consultants, academics, and natural resource professionals meet periodically to identify research needs,



to identify areas that serve as critical habitat for rare species or for a wide diversity of species, to develop information and recommendations which may help to guide wildlife managers wishing to improve habitat for SGCN, and to coordinate strategies for conserving Iowa's wildlife. The dedication of members of the conservation community is enormous, and keeps the IWAP a living document capable of response to changing conditions or new information.

- Katy Reeder
Iowa Wildlife Action Plan Manager

To learn more about the Iowa Wildlife Action Plan, go to:
<http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/diversity/plan.html>

Be a 2010 Natural Resource Aide!

Later this month, the Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program will begin accepting applications to fill our seasonal (i.e. temporary) field positions for 2010. Applications will be accepted until early to mid-January, and selected applicants will be contacted after then for interviews.

For more information or to apply for a position, visit <http://jobs.iowa.gov/> (search under 542-Natural Resources).

Be sure to also check the site for possible openings in other DNR bureaus such as Fisheries and Parks!

Visit <http://jobs.iowa.gov/> to search for openings!



Lower Morse Lake Complex Becomes Bird Conservation Area

This August, another unique area became Iowa's 14th official Bird Conservation Area (BCA). The Lower Morse Lake Grasslands, situated in Wright County within the rolling topography of north-central Iowa, is representative of the Prairie-Pothole landscape that existed here before its settlement by Euro-Americans. It is one of very few places in Iowa where a person can walk for several continuous miles without leaving public land and where one can still experience the feeling of what it must have been like when the landscape was still covered by prairie.

It's worth noting the area's uniqueness does not stop here, because to go along with the large grassland landscape is a wide variety of wildlife, especially birds. The early morning hours of spring can bring a cacophony of bird songs, including the cheerful, bubbling warble of a bobolink, the haunting wolf-whistle of the upland sandpiper, and the deep BLOONK-A-DOONK of the American bittern. Fully 100 species of Iowa's nesting birds can be found on this BCA during the mating season, in part because of the woodland/savanna

habitat that exists in conjunction with the grasslands and wetlands. For those who have an appreciation for waterfowl, this is a fine place to come in the spring. At least 18 species of ducks and geese frequent the area, with about half of them staying to nest. From dabblers like woodies (wood duck) to divers like hoodies (hooded merganser), this is a great place to observe duck behavior.

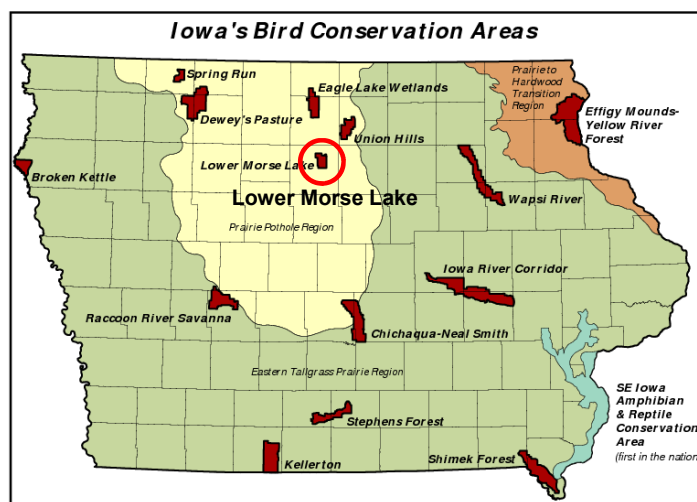
Of course the public lands within this BCA would not exist were it not for the tremendous partnerships between the public, private conservation organizations, and federal, state, and county conservation agencies. If it were not for such partnerships, there would be far fewer places on the Iowa landscape where *wildness* can still be experienced.

Jenni Dyar, an AmeriCorps Wildlife Diversity Research Assistant, has created a brochure

for this BCA that includes a bird checklist, which is available from this office.

On a related note, a public meeting to discuss a proposed BCA in Decatur, Ringgold and Union counties will be held this Wednesday, December 2 at 6:30pm at the Grand River Community Center in Grand River, IA. Join us in discussing the goals of the BCA program and how the proposed new area fits in.

- Bruce Ehresman
Avian Ecologist



To learn more about the Iowa DNR BCAs, go to:

http://www.iowadnr.com/wildlife/files/BCA_index.html

Iowa Joins the North American Amphibian Monitoring Program

In the 19th year of the survey, Iowa will take the next step in monitoring the most vocal representatives of our wetland resources. The North American Amphibian Monitoring Program, or NAAMP for short, has 23 participating states and has designated approximately 80 randomly scattered routes in Iowa.

Each route needs a volunteer surveyor, who will drive the route 3 times each spring and summer. Surveys are run at night and at each of the ten wetland stops the volunteer records what frogs and toads are singing after 5 minutes of listening.

It's a really fun way to explore the outdoors at night and the data collected on these routes are used not only in Iowa but at the regional and national level to monitor amphibian populations. To learn more about NAAMP visit the website at: <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/naamp/> and to volunteer and check on route availability contact me at 515-432-2823 ext 102 or stephanie.shepherd@dnr.iowa.gov.

- Stephanie Shepherd
Surveys & Data Coordinator



Some Good and Bad News about Funding for Wildlife

As Doug has already mentioned, we got some good news from Washington, DC, this fall. The State Wildlife Grants Program has received a \$15 million boost from previous years, which means \$90 million was set aside for the states to use on wildlife conservation activities. In addition the match required from the states was lowered from 50% to 35%. For Iowa this means approximately \$950,000 to be spent on research, habitat restoration and conservation activities, particularly for our species of greatest conservation need.

Teaming With Wildlife is a coalition of individuals, organizations and businesses supporting adequate and sustainable funding for natural resources. If you would like to get involved, you can endorse the coalition



online at www.teaming.com/action/ or contact me for more information (515-432-2823 ext 102; stephanie.shepherd@dnr.iowa.gov). And thank you to those of you already in the coalition for all the wonderful and effective support!

Since 1982, the Chickadee Check-off, or Fish and Wildlife Fund as it's now known, has given taxpayers an opportunity to donate to wildlife conservation in Iowa. Every cent of the money in this fund goes to the Wildlife Diversity Program benefitting non-game wildlife and has the bonus of freeing up more hunting and fishing license dollars to benefit all wildlife.

Unfortunately, revenues from the check-off have fallen precipitously in the past several years, and this year saw the fewest number of contributors since

2001 and an overall 23% drop in donations since 2001. Only 0.5% of Iowans contributed just over \$112,000 in 2008.

How can you help? If you are in a position to spread the word about the check-off, please do! I'd be happy to provide you a short article or ad, and we have pens and a beautiful bluebird bookmark that can be made available to folks. Contact me for more information (515-432-2823 ext 102; stephanie.shepherd@dnr.iowa.gov).

And most importantly, a huge and most sincere thank you to everyone who has donated to the fund over the years! Your dollars help immensely to support all of our programs from peregrine falcon restoration to frog and toad monitoring. We and Iowa's wildlife very much appreciate it!

- Stephanie Shepherd
Surveys & Data Coordinator

Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Program Schedule

Become a volunteer wildlife monitor! Pre-registration and a small fee are required for all workshops. For more information please visit our website:
<http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/diversity/vwmp.html>

Bird Nest Monitoring Workshops (for Raptors and Colonial Waterbirds)

March 13, 2010—Sioux City, IA

Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center, Woodbury County Conservation Board

March 20, 2010—Clarinda, IA

Page County Conservation Center

March 27, 2010—Newton, IA

Jasper County Community Center

Frog and Toad Call Survey Workshops

March 14, 2010—Sioux City, IA

Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center, Woodbury County Conservation Board

March 28, 2010—Newton, IA

Jasper County Community Center



2009 Hawk Watch at Effigy Mounds

Located just north of Marquette in north-east Iowa, Effigy Mounds National Monument hosted its 25th annual Hawk Watch weekend October 3-4. The event was coordinated by the Upper Iowa Audubon Society, with help and participation from the Iowa DNR, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Saving Our Avian Resources, and many individual volunteers.

Raptors were identified and counted as they passed over the Visitor Center by DNR staff, Audubon members, and other volunteers. In addition, some raptors were trapped, banded, and released at a banding station approximately one mile from the Visitor Center. Reports of banded birds help to monitor population trends and migration patterns. Birds from as far away as Alaska and Greenland have been trapped at the banding station near Effigy Mounds.

Saturday was damp and chilly, with drizzle off and on all day, resulting in poor migration conditions. Sunday was

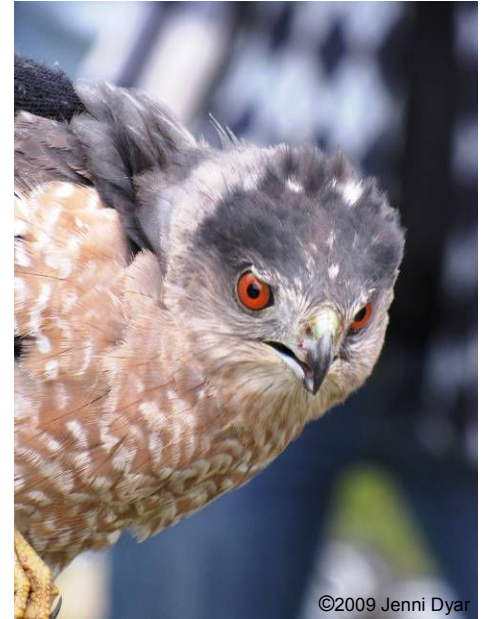
much improved with partly cloudy skies and a light breeze. Here are the official total counts for the weekend:

Turkey vulture - 107
Northern goshawk - 3
Cooper's hawk - 22
Sharp-shinned hawk - 19
Red-tailed hawk - 32
Broad-winged hawk - 2
Bald eagle - 27 (18 adults, 9 immature)
Peregrine falcon - 4
Merlin - 1
Unknown accipiter - 10
Unknown buteo - 8
Unknown falcon - 3
Unknown raptor - 4

Throughout the day there were also educational presentations, live bird programs, and several family-oriented activities at the Visitor Center.

Thanks to everyone who came out, and we look forward to seeing you next year!

- Jenni Dyar, AmeriCorps
Wildlife Diversity Research Assistant



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A close-up of an adult Cooper's hawk that was trapped, banded, and released during Hawk Watch at Effigy Mounds National Monument.

Chill Out with the BBA

Birders continue to collect valuable data as the 2nd Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas reaches the end of its second year. So far, volunteers have logged 3,300 hours of observation, visited 647 blocks, and recorded almost 180 species. These impressive accomplishments are a testament to the amazing dedication and enthusiasm of BBA volunteers. However, with only 20 blocks completed, we still have a long way to go to reach our goals.

Next year we should aim to revisit the 551 blocks with less than 10 hours of effort and visit the 144 blocks with no effort at all. Everyone is invited to participate. In fact, you can start right now by searching for used nests or keeping an eye out for species known to nest early, such as bald eagle and great horned owl.

Please remember to enter your data if you haven't already, or mail it to me and I can get it entered for you. This data is critical for the conservation and management of Iowa's wonderful birdlife. Finally, thanks to all the loyal volunteers who have dedicated their time this year. Your efforts are inspiring, and I can't wait to see what we accomplish next year!

- Billy Reiter-Marolf, AmeriCorps
BBA Volunteer Coordinator

For more information and to join the effort, go to:

<http://bba.iowabirds.org/>

Contact me any time via mail, phone, or email!

1436 255th St.
Boone, IA 50036

(515) 432-2823 ext. 117
Cell: (515) 298-3072
bbacoordinator@iowabirds.org



Species Spotlight: Spotted Skunk

The young farm boy sat down at the milk cow's flank and addressed his morning task. From every nook and cranny, barn cats appeared, mewling to encourage a little squirt of milk their way. Cats were anxiously begging for more when a black and white spotted critter waddled towards the milk tray for its fair share. Back in the depression era of diversified farming and milking cows by hand, farmers recognized a spotted skunk (or civet cat) as a real asset to mice and rat control around the farm. Many southern Iowa farmers welcomed spotted skunks into the fold of barn cats, and shared some of the morning's milk with them. These days, it is doubtful if many Iowans at all see spotted skunks.

Researchers believe the plains spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius interrupta*) evolved when a population of Eastern spotted skunks expanded north from the southern U.S. and Mexico after the last glaciation. The skunks inhabited dry forest-edge and scattered upland prairie as the population grew north along the Mississippi River. During the 1870s, settlers began draining the marshy prairie, creating more upland habitat. Draining of the tallgrass prairie peaked in 1920, corresponding with a peak in the abundance of plains spotted skunks throughout the Midwest. They inhabited riparian woodland areas, rocky canyons and outcrops, open prairies, vegetated fencerows, and cultivated lands. Denning sites were often associated with human features such as haystacks, woodpiles, and farm buildings.

W.D. Crabb studied the plains spotted skunk in southern Iowa from 1939-1942. Incredibly, 85% of farmers in his study area of 17.5 square miles, mainly in Van Buren county, had spotted skunks around their farm yard. Crabb determined their population density to be 13 spotted skunks per square mile. Within a relatively short time frame of

one farm-family generation, this distribution would practically disappear, as fur harvest records from several states document a decline of the plains spotted skunk after 1940.

By dissecting their scat, Crabb was able to study the skunks' food habits. Plains spotted skunks eat a variety of things, depending on the time of year, including mammals, insects, birds and their eggs, corn, and even fruit. When chemical treatments came into vogue in the 1950s, it was common practice to harvest hay or small grains in a circular manner flowing inward from field margins, until a small stand remained in the center of the field; it was doused with DDT. This was where all the grasshoppers and other undesirable insects swarmed. At night, roving carnivores like opossums and skunks were attracted to the bug smorgasbord, and each morning after treatment old-timers recall dozens of carnivores, mostly spotted skunks, among the dead and dying.

Plains spotted skunks join Indiana bats, plains pocket mice, and red-backed voles as the four endangered mammals in Iowa. These skunks weigh around a pound and a half, and are about the size of a squirrel. Their jet black fur is marked with white spots and patches. Most notable are a white triangular patch in the center of their forehead and white on the tip of the tail.

As an ecologist, Crabb wrote that spotted skunks deserved encouragement around Iowa farms. Research from the Multi-Species Inventory and Monitoring project is documenting the absence of plains spotted skunks in Iowa. Spotted skunks seem to be a species that has not adapted to modern farming impacts and practices on the land. Maintaining



Photo by: Bob Gress, Kansas DWP

components of our prairie food web is necessary for the vitality of all species in that web of life. To quote Aldo Leopold, "to keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering." This we do know: extinction is forever. Human communities draw upon a diversity of species for resources. And once a species is gone, all value to human use, as well as the value beyond human use, is also gone forever.

Some endangered species can benefit from relocating individuals or through breeding programs. There is no source of spotted skunks for reintroductions, and breeding programs are nonexistent. Even if there were, species' reintroductions are only one component of an integrated plan to enhance wildlife diversity. For a reintroduction to be truly successful, habitat is the key. Habitat benefitting spotted skunks would also provide homes for jackrabbits, badgers, harriers and other grassland species. As naturalist John Muir stated, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe."

- Pat Schlarbaum
Wildlife Diversity Technician II

**Please report any sightings of this rare animal to the Iowa DNR
Wildlife Diversity Program at (515) 432-2823.**

Please note the day and exact location where the animal was seen.

Last Look

As part of the Multi-Species Inventory & Monitoring project, trail cameras are set up by field crews around the state. Motion-activated and infrared-equipped (for photographing at night), these cameras provide a way to record shy or secretive species that otherwise might not be documented during field surveys. In the photo below, taken in Decatur county, a bobcat is caught on film as it makes its way up a creek bed.



A Publication of the:



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Events Calendar

2010 Bald Eagle Appreciation Days

Many bald eagles migrate to Iowa for the winter. Come out and enjoy them at one (or several) of the bald eagle events held this winter!

Jan. 2-3 & weekends Jan. 16-Feb. 14

Mississippi River Visitor Center
Rock Island, IL

Jan. 9: 8:30am-3:30pm

Clinton Community College
Clinton, IA

Jan. 9: 9am-1pm

Riverside Park
Muscatine, IA

Jan. 9: 9am-2pm

Ottumwa River Center
Ottumwa, IA

Jan. 9-10: 10am-8pm Sat, 10am-5pm Sun

QCCA Expo Center
Rock Island, IL

Jan. 16-17: 9am-3pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun

River City Mall
Keokuk, IA

Jan. 23: 9am-4:30pm

Grand River Center - Port of Dubuque
Dubuque, IA

Jan. 23: 9am-4pm

Lock & Dam 21
Quincy, IL

Jan. 30-31: 10am-1pm Sat, 1-4pm Sun

Mississippi Valley Welcome Center
LeClaire, WI

Feb. 19: time TBA

Lunch with the Eagles
Scott Street Dam, Des Moines, IA

Feb. 21: 10am-4pm

Saylorville Lake Visitor Center
Polk City, IA

Feb. 27: 9am-3pm

Prairie du Chien Regional Tourism Center
Prairie du Chien, WI

Mar. 6: 10am-5pm

Central College
Pella, IA

Mar. 6: 8:30am-12pm

Linn Grove Nature Center
Linn Grove, IA

For more information about each event, go to www.missriver.org or call (515) 432-2823.